



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*** STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION ADDRESS ***

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

Address to the WASB • WASDA • WASBO • Education Convention

Midwest Airline Center, Milwaukee — January 21, 2009

Welcome to the 2009 State Education Convention. Thank you, Kim Eparvier for that kind introduction. We appreciate your leadership in Peshtigo and as Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) President.

And thank you to the Franklin High School Wind Ensemble, directed by Scott Julius. As a former music educator and the daughter of a music educator, I know firsthand how the arts feed the soul and the imagination. We thank our student musicians for their wonderful performance this morning. Let's give them another round of applause.

For eight years, it has been my honor to address you as Wisconsin's chief advocate for students and their schools. I am so grateful for the strong support I have had from school board members, school district administrators, and school business officials, and it is my privilege as a third generation Wisconsin teacher to represent you as state superintendent.

I want to thank you for the tremendous commitment you demonstrate in these tough times serving the children, public schools, and communities of Wisconsin. You have some of the hardest jobs in the state, and yet you consistently bring local communities together around our shared responsibility to provide a quality education for all our children.

I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of your associations and their executive directors: John Ashley and all of WASB; Miles Turner, WASDA; and Woody Wiedenhoef and WASBO. They do a great job representing and bringing you together. Let's give them a hand.

In Wisconsin, we take justifiable pride in our great public schools. More of our students are taking rigorous coursework with nation-leading graduation rates and achievement on the ACT. And in every community, our students inspire us through their achievements in the arts, athletics, Career and Technical Student Organizations, and community service.

For eight years, we have worked together to advance quality public education in Wisconsin for all our students no matter where they live in our state. Together, we have accomplished so much.

- There are now 34,000 children participating in 4-year-old kindergarten in 319 districts. 4K has expanded by 90 percent, serving 135 percent more students.
- We have ensured smaller class sizes through the SAGE program gaining 60 percent more state aid, the first increase ever, this past budget.

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- We implemented the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative (PI 34) advancing professional development for all educators with new state aid grants for mentors.
 - We have 585 more National Board Certified Teachers and Master Educators; up by hundreds in eight years.
 - We focused attention on small rural districts; developed and gained passage of new state sparsity aid funding.

We fought for:

- the first increases in transportation aid in 15 years, now amounting to over 60 percent more state funding;
- help for declining enrollment districts, which account for more than 60 percent of our school districts;
- a new high-cost special education aid program, our Keeping the Promise initiative;
- new grants for gifted and talented, Advanced Placement, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, and school nurses;
- increased school nutrition programs with more funding for school breakfasts;
- an expanded on-line data reporting system through WINSS and our school finance portal, making reporting efficient and public education transparent for all;
- the development of early learning and financial literacy standards and strengthened the rigor and relevance of our model academic standards for 21st century learning;
- grants from the Wallace Foundation, that helped us develop the Wisconsin Urban Schools Leadership Project, now a national model for professional development for urban principals;
- a statewide global literacy initiative, making Wisconsin a national leader in international education; and
- expanded service-learning, arts, and citizenship education, enhancing creativity and the civic mission of our public schools as the foundation of our American democracy.

Eight years of hard work are making an impact.

Thanks to your leadership, our public schools are a continuing source of pride for the people of Wisconsin. Your vision and work at the community level ignites public support for our schools. Leadership at the local level has never been more important. It is the heart and soul of Wisconsin's progressive tradition.

When I hear the words, "we are facing the toughest economic challenges since the Great Depression," I, like you, know that all of us will be called upon in unprecedented ways to keep our families and communities together.

Here in Wisconsin, we have long held the belief that the days of our children will be better than our own. So we must move through these hard times together.

Together, we must ensure that every child, no matter the economic or educational level of their parents, race, ethnicity, what language they speak at home, or where they live in our state, is prepared with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the 21st century interconnected world.

You understand this is more than an education issue. It is a moral and social justice issue. And it is an economic imperative for our state and nation. Especially now.

Especially because we need economic recovery and re-investment. And, education *is* our best investment. Any federal stimulus package must support our public schools.

A child is more than a test score. A quality education is one that addresses the social, cognitive, emotional, and physical needs of diverse learners beginning in early childhood. We must move from No Child Left Behind to every child a graduate, confident in their ability to learn.

This generation will define what it means to be an American in the world today. One hundred years ago, we prepared students to compete with their neighboring communities, 50 years ago with other states. Now, our children must be ready to communicate and work with students around the world. Our children must meet world-class standards, and they need to know the world like they know their neighborhood.

We all know that a struggling economy across the world, our nation, state, and local communities, increased poverty, escalating costs, and revenue caps are all impacting educational opportunities right here in Wisconsin. Our schools are our hope for the future.

In these difficult times, the people of Wisconsin turn everyday to our public schools for stability and support. If you want your spirit and soul re-invigorated, visit the schools in any of our 426 school districts.

Our children are watching us. Watching and learning from the decisions we will make during tough times. We must keep our voices strong and united as we continue to bring people together around our shared value and responsibility of moving Wisconsin forward through a strong public education system.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your state superintendent. It is an honor to work for you and with you as together we fight for our children and quality education in the great state of Wisconsin.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTE: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>.